

BuffaloNews.com

ERIE COUNTY

Collins agrees to participate in audit of Medicaid

By **Matthew Spina**

Published: May 7, 2011, 12:00 AM

[1 Comment](#)

[Recommend](#)

3

Updated: May 7, 2011, 9:01 AM

Advertisement

Trust your eyes
to the experts
OPEN HOUSE



5:30 p.m. FREE screenings
6:00 p.m. Presentation
and live surgery, followed by
question and answer session

CLICK FOR MORE INFO
www.fichte.com



**Fichte Endl
& Elmer**
EYECARE

2825 Niagara Falls Blvd.
Amherst
1-800-309-2020 

It took a special act from Erie County's state-appointed control board. But a county department controlled by County Executive Chris Collins apparently will participate in an audit by Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz, one seeking out fraud or abuse among Medicaid vendors in the county.

The Collins team weeks ago set up one of its latest roadblocks for Poloncarz and his auditors: They would not participate in any audit — even one focused on Medicaid, the major Collins' rant—unless the control board agreed an audit should be conducted. That's because the control board sponsors Poloncarz's internal auditing team this year, after stepping in to save it from Collins' budget-cutting ax. So Collins aides wanted to see control board consent.

The control board recently endorsed the Medicaid audit and a list of other subjects as worthy—though somewhat reluctantly because nothing in the county's laws required that the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority grant prior approval to the auditors' work.

“It just boggles my imagination,” said control board member Mark R. Walling, when told of Collins’ stance.

“I thought we were all on the same side,” said Poloncarz’s chief auditor, Michael Szukala. “I would have thought that exposing Medicaid fraud would have been one of those things we could all agree on. Sadly, I was mistaken.”

Medicaid is a favorite Collins target. The county executive, like many of those before him, rails about the staggering cost Medicaid places on county taxpayers — more than \$200 million a year and almost as much as the county raises in property taxes.

Poloncarz’s auditors intend to hunt for signs of overpayments to vendors, such as drug providers, providers of medical equipment, ambulance services and companies that shuttle Medicaid patients to doctors’ offices. The auditors have hundreds of companies to choose from.

Poloncarz’s auditors started their work by sending the Collins-appointed Social Services commissioner, Carol Dankert, a letter asking for documents that indicate where the Social Services staff has looked for fraud, and a list of Medicaid vendors.

They received a response from Grant J. Loomis, Collins’ acting chief of staff, who said the county executive’s departments will not participate in an audit without control board approval.

Szukala, the chief auditor, did not go before the control board Thursday just to seek help in compelling the county executive’s department to participate. He and Poloncarz already had decided they would pursue the Medicaid audit anyway. But the control board asked Szukala to preview his upcoming work, and he told the county’s financial overseers of the flap.

When the control board directors approved the list of proposed audits, Chairman Daniel C. Oliverio stressed that he wanted to see audits that either return money to county government or find at least enough savings to justify the \$740,000 in state taxpayer money that keeps the auditors working this year.

Oliverio liked the Medicaid audit. He also endorsed another inquiry about the overtime wages paid in the Sheriff’s Office, which outruns its overtime budget by millions of dollars each year.

mspina@buffnews.com

Comments

SORT: NEWEST FIRST | OLDEST FIRST

What do they mean he agrees? He is an elected public official that is supposed to look after our best interests (I know LOL). Why would he disagree with an audit? Even worse though is when politicians refuse to comment! REALLY! How about no paycheck?

RICK GRASER, CHEEKTOWAGA, NY on Sat May 7, 2011 at 12:39 PM

FLAG AS INAPPROPRIATE

Add your comment

Copyright 1999 - 2011 - The Buffalo News copyright-protected material.